



CAMP CLINGMAN



Postwar Tournament Grounds



Confederate troops camped early in the war a block in front of you at Camp Clingman, named for Thomas L. Clingman (1812–1897), who resided here from 1837 until his death. A state senator, then a United States congressman (1843–1845; 1847–1858) and senator (1858–1861), Clingman was one of the most outspoken politicians of the pre-war era. His pro-slavery and states' rights positions led him to support secession, and he declared to Congress, “Do us justice and we stand with you; attempt to trample on us and we separate.” He was the last Southern senator to leave Washington D.C., but refused to



Gen. Thomas L. Clingman – Courtesy Library of Congress

resign his seat and became one of ten expelled from the Senate in absentia. Clingman was

appointed colonel of the 25th North Carolina Infantry then was promoted to brigadier general on May 17, 1862. He commanded a brigade consisting of the 8th, 31st, 51st, and 61st North Carolina Infantry Regiments and led it in the Carolinas and, beginning early in 1864, in Virginia. He was wounded south of Petersburg in August 1864, spent months recuperating, and rejoined the Army of Northern Virginia shortly before the surrender. Clingman returned to Asheville after the war and practiced law.

In 1865–1866, returning Confederates and others used this area as a tournament ground. Local resident Forster A. Sondley recalled these events:

The rider at full speed attempted to catch on his sabre a metal ring of about two inches in diameter suspended from the arm of an upright post which projected about half way over the course. ... [In addition], two posts about as high as a house ... were surmounted by slender upright wooden pegs about six inches high, on top of which were fastened wooden balls four inches in diameter so that the pegs would constitute necks. The rider galloping by attempted to sever these necks with his sabre so that the balls would fall to the ground. ... Then the effort was to catch the ring on a long lance. ... About the same time was revived ... the barbarous old English practice of the days of Shakespeare called a 'gander-pulling' in which instead of the ring was suspended a live gander with greased head and neck, while every rider attempted to pull off the bird's head.

The site later became Asheville's first baseball field and was also used for picnics, political speeches, and other public gatherings.



“A Modern Tournament,” Harper’s Weekly, December 4, 1869 – Courtesy Library of Congress